

# MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION

## GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING COLD FOOD STORAGE DURING POWER OUTAGES

The weather conditions that occasionally occur in the area can result in electric power outages. These outages can vary in length from only a few minutes to several days. Of prime concern during these occurrences, is what can be done to save the food items stored in the refrigerator and/or freezer.

The following steps are recommended to help you save your refrigerated food investment.

1. KEEP THE FREEZER DOOR CLOSED AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. Many food items will remain frozen for up to 72 hours if the door is kept closed.
2. Frozen fruits, ice cream, fish and vegetables are examples of foods, which will thaw quickly. A top mount refrigerator-freezer will hold most foods for up to 24 hours. Side by side configuration refrigerator freezer units will hold foods up to 12 hours.
3. Density does make a difference. The fuller the freezer, the longer it will stay cold!
4. If the outage exceeds 24 hours in duration, it would be advisable to utilize dry ice to refrigerate the foods. Dry ice, if placed on top of the food items can keep them solidly frozen. REMEMBER TO USE GLOVES WHEN HANDLING DRY ICE. If dry ice is not available, use regular ice and replenish it as needed.

When the power is restored you must decide on which food items to keep and which to discard. The following suggestions are offered.

### 1. FREEZER UNIT:

- A. Meats – If ice crystals are present, they can be refrozen safely.
- B. Fish and shellfish – Should be cooked and used immediately.
- C. If the food is completely thawed, it should be cooked first and then refrozen. Any frozen item should be used as soon as possible.
- D. Completely thawed packages of vegetables should not be refrozen.
- E. Frozen fruits will suffer some loss of taste and flavor.

### 2. REFRIGERATOR SECTION:

This unit should be checked with a suitable thermometer. If the air temperature exceeds 40 degrees Fahrenheit, potentially hazardous food such as meats, dairy products, poultry, and fish should be discarded and not used. Remember, **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.**

### 3. ODOR REMOVAL:

The following suggestions are made concerning the elimination of odors, which may persist, in the unit after a power outage has occurred.

- A. Take out all removable parts and wash with detergent and warm water. Remember to wash the gasket and door liner. Rinse thoroughly and dry.
- B. Wash the interior walls with a solution of two tablespoons of baking soda to one quart of water.
- C. Baking soda, activated charcoal, or fresh ground coffee, placed in shallow pans are products which have been found to be quite effective in the elimination of odors.
- D. If none of the above methods satisfactorily take care of the odor problems, you will probably require the services of a professional refrigeration specialist who may have to remove the unit liner and replace the insulation.